



**NAVAJO NATION
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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Baahaali Chapter celebrate new parking lot after decades of development



After 25 years of discussion and planning, the Baahaali Chapter finally celebrated the opening of their new parking lot. Community members previously had difficulties slogging through mud to reach the chapter house, senior citizens center and Head Start. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

BAAHAALI-Residents of Baahaali Chapter will no longer have to slog through mud to reach the chapter compound. Instead, they now have the convenience and benefits of a paved parking lot, complete with accessibility for disabled persons.

On September 16, 2011, the community celebrated the opening of the new chapter parking lot, after over 25 years of development, according to chapter president Isabelle Morgan.

In the last decade, Baahaali Chapter secured funding for the planning and construction of the entire chapter compound, which includes the Head Start and Senior Citizens Center.

In 2008, the chapter saved \$540,000 for the planning and construction, but faced a budget shortfall after unforeseen cost increases in building materials appeared due to the lagging national economy.

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Charles Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) requested funding for the chapter from the Council.

"This parking is very good for the community and (the community) voted for this project to move forward," Damon said.

Damon said the chapter is now able to move forward with multi-agency funding projects of this type with relative ease, after gain-

ing valuable insights completing the parking lot.

The community of Baahaali is at an elevation of 7,300 feet and is located 25 miles south of Gallup and is seven miles east of New Mexico Highway 602.

The chapter became Local Governance Act certified on December 24, 2008.

Navajo Nation Division of Community Development Director Arbin Mitchell said the parking lot first came to his attention shortly after taking the reins of the division in 2005.

"I am thankful and appreciative for this completed project. Six years ago, when I first stepped into my position, Ms. Morgan approached me and said the chapter needed to complete some projects and one of them was this parking lot," Mitchell said.

Mitchell said the project was federally funded, with policies and reporting attached to the revenue, resulting in a lengthy time period to complete the parking lot.

He said the completion of the parking lot would not have been possible without the vote of the community members and the resolution that was approved for the project to proceed.

"This project cost about \$500,000. It wasn't just a paving project,

there were studies that had to be conducted to address water drainage and other considerations. Plans and designs were done,” he said.

Phase I of the project involved soil testing, drainage study and final design. Next came the earth moving and paving to finish the parking lot.

Previously, the chapter had to deal with muddy parking conditions, which made the Head Start and Senior Center impassable. Even the garbage trucks were unable to collect trash.

The soil content for the Baahaali Chapter consists mostly of clay, which becomes thick, sticky mud, which greatly reduces vehicle traction.

The days of muddy chapter house flooring are finally over.

Emery Chee, land board member for the chapter, said the whole community is happy the project reached completion.

“I worked on this project for over two years and witnessed your chapter leaders lose sleep over this parking lot,” Chee said. “These days, (people) require paved parking areas.

“A long time ago, it wasn’t like that. But as you age, paved walkways are a necessity,” he added.

Annie Descheny, secretary/treasurer, said her earliest memories of discussion on the parking lot stretched back to 1986, when she was elected council delegate.

“I would visit Arbin Mitchell and ask him about the status of the parking lot. He helped us a lot and we went through Arbin to get things done,” Descheny said.

“If it wasn’t for you, I don’t think we would have ever seen this parking lot. We would all still probably walking around in the mud right now,” she said.

Equally thankful was chapter manager Gloria Skeet de Cruz.

“It takes a team to get a project done. It’s just not one person. It’s a team,” Skeet de Cruz said.

She said Damon got the Navajo Nation Council to approve over \$200,000 for the parking lot, with the remainder coming from New Mexico Capital Outlay, Navajo Department of Transportation, Capital Improvement Office and Design and Engineering Services.

“The other people I want to thank are the voters of Baahaali Chapter. Without your vote, we would not be getting this money,” Skeet de Cruz said. “I want to especially thank our chapter officials.

“If you do not have the support of your leadership, you do not get things done,” she added.



Navajo Nation Division of Community Development Director Arbin Mitchell said it was the vote of chapter members that got the process started for the new parking lot. Mitchell said the new parking lot cost half a million dollars to complete. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Navajo Nation Council Delegate Charles Damon II said the new parking lot was a learning experience for the chapter. He said the chapter can now proceed with similar projects with relative ease. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



The community of Baahaali gathered to celebrate the opening of the new parking lot for the chapter. Chapter residents had to deal with the sticky, muddy clay conditions. (Photo by Rick Abasta)